

Soviet Sub Base in Cuba?

It is curious that neither Moscow nor Havana has reacted publicly to the White House warning against construction of a Soviet strategic submarine base in Cuba. On occasion in the past the Soviet Government has been quick to deny much less serious accusations appearing even in obscure publications. But in this case, when a White House spokesman raised the possibility that the Kremlin had secretly begun work that would violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the 1962 Khrushchev-Kennedy agreement, there has not been a word of Soviet comment.

Pessimists will conclude that this silence confirms Washington's worst fears. Optimists will argue that Soviet leaders are taking another look at whatever plans may be underway for the Cuban port of Cienfuegos and have not yet decided what to do in the light of the White House statement.

The world was probably closer to thermonuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 than at any time before or since. In reporting the agreement which had resolved the crisis, President Kennedy said that the Soviet leaders had promised to remove all "weapons systems capable of offensive use" and "to halt the further introduction of such systems into Cuba." In return the United States agreed to lift its naval quarantine and to "give assurances against an invasion of Cuba." President Kennedy was thinking of land-based missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, but submarines having similar missiles and nuclear weapons are also "weapons systems capable of offensive use."

Violations of this understanding, coming on top of the current Soviet violations of the cease-fire pact in the Suez Canal zone, would certainly undermine any confidence in agreements with the Soviet Union. In this situation any Soviet move to create a submarine base in Cuba would only intensify tension between the two superpowers and strengthen retrogressive forces in both countries that would intensify the arms race.